

**EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF AUTONOMY SUPPORTIVE  
TEACHERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ESL CLASSROOM  
ENGAGEMENT AND HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOURS**

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*A thesis submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia  
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## Exploring The Dimensions of Autonomy Supportive Teachers and Their Influence on ESL Classroom Engagement and Help Seeking Behaviours

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed method study is to explore and measure the prevalence of ESL teachers support on student's autonomy during their learning process within a self-determination theory framework. Since there are controversy and doubt about the universality of autonomy needs in different social background, how students perceive their teacher's autonomy support in the local context was explored. In order to better conceptualize the construct of teacher autonomy support in the local setting, qualitative method was employed to understand the phenomena. Seventy students were involved in the focus group discussion to elicit information about students experience in learning English. Data from six focus group interviews indicated four types of autonomy support motivating styles. These four dimensions are viewed as autonomy supportive where they contribute to the attainment of student's interest in learning. All the four autonomy support motivating styles have some similarity and differences with previous findings. Focus group findings indicated that while students appeared motivated to be engaged, they do experience barriers in learning through teachers who are more controlling and a classroom which is not optimally conducive.

The qualitative findings then guide the development of items and scales for a quantitative survey instrument. The newly developed Teacher Autonomy Support Scale and its psychometric properties enable the examination of relationships with classroom engagement and help seeking behaviors. The tenability of the scale was further corroborated by looking at the relationship with all the proposed variables using structural equation model. The study also adopted self-determination theory's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness as mediators. The direct and indirect effects of these needs were examined as mediation analyses. 378 samples from Form 4 students were selected from multistage cluster sampling from 14 day schools in the state of Perlis. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 14.0 and AMOS 14.0 (Structural Equation Modeling).

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a four factor structure representing autonomy supportive constructs which were teachers who are being responsible, approachable, conveys confidence and shows respect towards their students. The four factor structure demonstrated acceptable validity and internal consistency for the newly developed teacher autonomy support scale. Teachers who are being responsible or accountable in their profession were identified as nurturing and building student's motivation in the local context which was not identified in previous studies.

Good fitting results from the model provided support for the proposed model. The universality of the motivational constructs of autonomy is not doubted but the way our student's perceived autonomy support somewhat different from other social contexts where they perceive teachers who are responsible in their profession as autonomy supportive in order for them to take charge of their own learning. All the direct effect shows significant positive relationship to psychological needs. Perceived competence's magnitude was found the lowest. In turn, the indirect analysis of perceived competence was the highest and has doubled the value from the direct effect, indicating students need

to internalise that they are competent enough to master the language. If they do not perceive themselves as competent they will not be engaged and seek help in acquiring the language. The findings suggest that teachers should be more autonomy supportive to make students perceive themselves as competent which thus, create autonomous learners. The utility of self-determination theory in classroom setting demonstrate strong evidence to understand ESL student's internalisation of values in the learning context. Implications for research and practice were also presented.

Penerokaan Dimensi Sokongan Autonomi Guru dan Impak Dimensi Tersebut  
Dalam Penglibatan dan Perilaku Meminta Bantuan Dalam Bilik Darjah Bahasa Inggeris

Abstrak

Tujuan kajian kaedah gabungan kualitatif dan kuantitatif (*mixed methods*) ini ialah untuk menguji sejauh manakah sokongan autonomi guru bahasa Inggeris berpengaruh terhadap pelajar dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran di samping melihat impak penglibatan mereka dalam kelas bahasa Inggeris serta perilaku meminta bantuan dalam kerangka teori penentuan sendiri (*self-determination theory*, SDT). Disebabkan kontroversi yang masih berlanjutan berkenaan dengan konstruk autonomi dalam pelbagai latar belakang sosial, perkara ini penting sebagai langkah untuk meneroka persepsi para pelajar terhadap sokongan autonomi guru dalam konteks bilik darjah semasa pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Dalam usaha memantapkan konstruk ini berdasarkan konteks tempatan, kaedah kualitatif diaplikasikan untuk mengenalpasti fenomena ini. Tujuh puluh orang pelajar terlibat dalam temubual kumpulan berfokus untuk berkongsi maklumat tentang pengalaman mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris. Data temubual daripada 6 kumpulan berfokus didapati terdapat sebanyak 4 dimensi sokongan autonomi. Empat jenis sokongan ini dilihat sebagai sokongan autonomi memandangkan pengaruh mereka dalam menimbulkan minat dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Sementelahan, keempat-empat dimensi jika dibandingkan dengan kajian lepas terdapat persamaan dan perbezaan. Dapatan kajian kumpulan berfokus menunjukkan bahawa pelajar bermotivasi untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti bilik darjah, tetapi mereka menghadapi masalah pembelajaran daripada guru yang terlalu mengongkong dan keadaan bilik darjah yang tidak kondusif.

Dapatan data kualitatif menjurus ke arah pembentukan item soal selidik. Pembentukan instrumen baru bagi mengukur sokongan autonomi serta kepastian ciri psikometrik membolehkan hubungan di antara penyertaan dalam bilik darjah dan tingkah laku meminta bantuan dikaji. Keupayaan instrumen ini dikaji dengan lanjut apabila dihubungkan dengan semua faktor-faktor lain menggunakan model persamaan berstruktur. Kajian ini menggunakan pembolehubah perantara daripada SDT untuk melihat keperluan asas psikologikal pelajar terhadap autonomi, kecekapan dan saling hubungan. Hubungan secara langsung dan tidak langsung dikaji melalui kajian perantara. 378 orang pelajar tingkatan 4 dipilih melalui sampel rawak berlapis pelbagai peringkat daripada 14 buah sekolah menengah harian di negeri Perlis. Data dianalisa menggunakan SPSS versi 14 dan AMOS 14.0 (Model Persamaan Berstruktur).

Analisis faktor Penerokaan dan Pengesahan menyokong kewujudan empat dimensi sokongan autonomi guru yang mewakili bertanggungjawab, kemesraan, rasa hormat dan menggalakkan keyakinan. Empat dimensi ini menunjukkan tahap kebolehpercayaan dan kesahan yang boleh diterima. Guru yang bertanggungjawab didapati dapat memotivasikan pelajar untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris secara berautonomi yang merupakan dimensi yang baru yang tidak dikenalpasti dalam kajian lepas.

Kesepadanan model dengan data kajian membuktikan bahawa konstruk autonomi adalah penting untuk setiap pelajar tetapi persepsi sokongan autonomi guru dalam membolehkan pelajar bertanggungjawab dalam pembelajaran sendiri adalah berbeza

dalam konteks tempatan. Hubungan langsung adalah signifikan kearah pembolehubah perantara dan didapati hubungan langsung persepsi kecekapan adalah paling rendah. Hubungan tidak langsung persepsi kecekapan kearah penyertaan bilik darjah adalah paling tinggi menunjukkan lebih tinggi persepsi kecekapan bahasa Inggeris lebih tinggi penyertaan bilik darjah. Dapatan kajian mencadangkan guru memberikan sokongan autonomi kepada pelajar agar mereka dapat menjadi pelajar yang bertanggungjawab atas pembelajaran mereka. Penggunaan SDT untuk memahami nilai persepsi pelajar bahasa Inggeris meningkatkan kesedaran guru dalam meneruskan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang efektif. Implikasi untuk guru dan pihak sekolah turut dibincangkan.



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Student classroom engagement has always been a great concern of educators especially for those teaching English to second language learners in Malaysia (Airil Haimi, 2005; Parilah, 2002). Some of these concerns are students' literacy and thinking skills, students' involvement and participation in learning tasks, and their motivation to learn. Combine these concerns with the limited understanding we have of what variables can improve ESL classroom engagement, and the widespread contention that ESL classrooms are not supportive enough of second language learning may just seem justified. Furthermore, the prevalence of disengagement amongst Malaysian ESL students is seen as turning down opportunities to succeed in the competitive technological world (Pandian, 2004). This last point seems to suggest that the general decline in the standard of English amongst students will be seen as a hindrance to the progress and development of the country (Baskaran, 2002).

English language classrooms play a pivotal role in bringing about a better command of the language, and thus, in improving our human capital (Lee Su Kim, 2004). Classroom engagement reflects a student's motivation to learn. Motivating students to learn is one of the key components of effective teaching and classroom management (Stipek, 2004). In Malaysian ESL classrooms, motivating students to learn is a serious challenge that many

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